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DISARMAMENT FACT SHEETS

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COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMME OF DISARMAMENT

One of the decisions of the United Nations General Assembly at its special session devoted to disarmament in 1978 was to start work on a comprehensive programme of disarmament -- an agreed framework for sustained international action on specific disarmament measures. The programme, the Assembly said, should encompass all measures advisable to reach the goal of general and complete disarmament under effective international control.

The Disarmament Commission composed of all UN Members was given the task of considering the elements of a comprehensive programme of disarmament, to be submitted to the Assembly. The programme will be elaborated by the Geneva-based Committee on Disarmament, which holds its next session early in 1980. It is hoped that the comprehensive programme of disarmament can be adopted no later than 1982, when the Assembly will convene its second special session on disarmament.

General and Complete Disarmament

The goal of "general and complete disarmament under effective international control" has been the ultimate aim of the UN's disarmament efforts since 1959. In the 20 years since that goal was proclaimed, many countries have offered detailed proposals for reductions of armaments in stages, with variations as to which types of arms or forces would be reduced first, numerical limits to be set, timetables and methods of control. Despite discussions in the Assembly, at the Geneva negotiations and elsewhere, no agreements were reached on an all-inclusive plan for disarmament.

Today general and complete disarmament is no longer regarded as an objective to be achieved through a single treaty embodying timetables for all measures of nuclear and conventional disarmament. It is seen as a goal to work towards in the expectation that each specific agreement will lead to another - increasing mutual confidence at each stage and thus adding to the chances of success in the next phase.

What It Means

General and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control, the Assembly said, means that States would have at their disposal "only those non-nuclear forces, armaments, facilities and establishment as are agreed to be necessary to maintain internal order and protect the personal security of citizens and in order that States shall support and provide agreed manpower for a United Nations peace force".

Action So Far

Meeting in 1979, the Disarmament Commission outlined elements of a comprehensive programme, envisaged as a package of inter-related measures to be carried out in stages.

The Commission, composed of all UN Members, agreed that the programme in its first stage should give special attention to ending the nuclear arms race and the threat of nuclear war. The programme is to reflect the priorities set by the special session: "Priorities in disarmament negotiations shall be: nuclear weapons; other weapons of mass destruction including chemical weapons; conventional weapons, including any which may be deemed to be excessively injurious or to have indiscriminate effects; and reduction of armed forces".

The process to be outlined, the Commission said, should take place in an equitable manner ensuring the right of each State to security, and should take into account the importance of both nuclear and conventional disarmament, as well as "the special responsibility of the States with the largest military arsenals and the necessity for adequate measures of verification".

Proposed Disarmament Measures

The Disarmament Commission has proposed that the comprehensive programme of disarmament should encompass the following disarmament measures:

- Nuclear test ban;

- Cessation of the nuclear arms race in all its aspects and nuclear disarmament, requiring agreements at appropriate stages for cessation of qualitative improvement and development of nuclear weapon systems, cessation of production of nuclear weapons and their means of delivery, cessation of production of fissionable material for weapons purposes, and reduction of stockpiles of nuclear weapons and means of delivery, leading to their complete elimination at the earliest possible time;

- Effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons;

- Continuation of the strategic arms limitation (SALT) negotiations between the United States and Soviet Union;

- Further steps to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons;

- Establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones;

- Prohibition of the development, production and stockpiling of all chemical weapons and their destruction;

- Prevention of the emergence of new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons;

- Prohibition of the development, production and use of radiological weapons;

- Cessation of the conventional arms race;

- Multilateral, regional and bilateral agreements on limitation and reduction of conventional weapons and armed forces;

- Prohibitions or restrictions of use of certain conventional weapons including those which may cause unecessary suffering or have indiscriminate effects, taking into account the results of the September 1979 UN Conference on that subject;

- Consultations among major arms suppliers and recipients on the international transfer of conventional weapons;

- Reduction of military expenditures;

- Verification methods and procedures to facilitate disarmament agreements and create confidence among States;

- Further steps to prohibit military or other hostile use of environmental modification techniques, and to prevent an arms race on the sea-bed and in outer space;

- Establishment of zones of peace.

The Disarmament Commission also wants the programme to cover a number of other measures for confidence-building, relaxation of international tensions, prevention of the use of force, mobilization of world public opinion in favour of disarmament, and reallocation of resources to ensure that disarmament contributes to economic and social development.

October 1979.

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